

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Sauli Niinistö of Finland and Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden

May 19, 2022

President Biden. Please, please, be seated. Thank you.

It's not only a beautiful day, this is, in my view and the view of my team, a momentous day. It's a very, very good day.

Today I am proud to welcome and offer the strong support of the United States for the applications of two great democracies and two close, highly capable partners to join the strongest, most powerful defensive alliance in the history of the world; two proud, independent countries exercising their sovereign right all states possess to decide their own security. President Niinistö, you are—and Prime Minister Andersson: You're—it's a great honor to have both of you here at the White House as Finland and Sweden begin the process of joining NATO.

It was out of the wreckage of World War II that NATO was formed. And in the seven decades that followed, NATO has proved itself an indispensable alliance committed to a Europe whole, free, and at peace. But in recent years, doubts began to arise. Was NATO still relevant? Was it still effective? Is it still needed in the 21st-century world?

Today, there is no question: NATO is relevant, it is effective, and it is more needed now than ever. The indispensable alliance of decades past is still the indispensable alliance for the world we face today and, I would argue, tomorrow as well. And the decision of Sweden and Finland, the one they have made, is testament to that commitment. This is about the future. It's about a revived NATO that has the tools and resources, the clarity and conviction to defend our shared values and lead the world.

Sweden and Finland are already among our closest partners on a range of issues, from strengthening peace and stability to advancing human rights, to taking on climate—the climate crisis and addressing food insecurity, from strengthening the global health to promoting development.

Finnish and Swedish troops—Finnish and Swedish troops—have already served shoulder to shoulder with U.S. and NATO forces in Kosovo, in Afghanistan, and in Iraq. And both Finland and Sweden are already working in coordination with the United States and our other allies and partners to support the brave people of Ukraine as they defend their freedom against Russia's invasion.

Sweden and Finland have strong democratic institutions, strong militaries, and strong and transparent economies, and a strong moral sense of what is right. They meet every NATO requirement, and then some. And having two new NATO members in the high north will enhance the security of our alliance and deepen our security cooperation across the board.

Today the President, the Prime Minister, and I had a very good discussion about NATO accession, about the war in Ukraine, and strengthening transatlantic security. But our conversations began well before today.

President Niinistö and I spoke last December and again in January in the weeks leading up to Russia's unjust and unprovoked assault on Ukraine. In March, the President came to the White House—came to the White House—to see me, to discuss this brutal conflict and the rupture it's causing in Europe.

While we were in the Oval Office together, we picked up the phone and we called the Prime Minister. And the three of us all spoke, and we spoke again last week when I invited them to come to the White House today.

We have consulted closely at every stage as Sweden and Finland made their determinations. And today I'm proud to assure them that they have the full, total, complete backing of the United States of America.

Today my administration is submitting to the United States Congress reports on NATO accession for both countries so the Senate can efficiently and quickly move on advising and consenting to the treaty. I greatly appreciate Senator Schumer and McConnell's support, as well as Senator Menendez and Risch, to move this through the Senate as quickly as possible once the perspective of all allies are addressed and NATO adopts the accession protocols.

The bottom line is simple, quite straightforward: Finland and Sweden make NATO stronger, not just because of their capacity, but because they're strong, strong democracies. And a strong, united NATO is the foundation of America's security.

By joining NATO, allies make a sacred commitment to one another that an attack on one is an attack against all. It's article 5 of the Washington Treaty and the core building block of our alliance. And the only time in history article 5 has been invoked was after 9/11, when the United States was attacked and all our allies rallied to our side.

The United States will never forget that. And we will never fail in our pledge to defend every single inch of NATO territory. I welcome Sweden and Finland choosing that responsibility as well. This is going to benefit all of our people.

And today the President, Prime Minister, and I committed that we're going to work together to remain vigilant against the threats to our shared security and deter and confront any aggression while Finland and Sweden are in this accession process. "There's nothing going to be missed," as my mother would say, "between the cup and lip." We're in, once it is moving forward. I really mean it. And I really mean it.

So let me be clear: New members joining NATO is not a threat to any nation. It never has been. NATO's purpose is to defend against aggression. That's its purpose: to defend. And let me—let me make—let no one make a mistake the meaning of this historic day. In the face of aggression, NATO has not grown weaker or more divided; it has grown stronger, more united.

With Finland and Sweden's decision to request membership in NATO, it will be enhanced for all time. Standing together today, we reject the bloody creed that "might makes right," and we declare a more powerful creed: "All for one, and one for all." Because what makes NATO strong isn't just our enormous military capacity, but our commitment to each other, to its values.

NATO is an alliance of choice, not coercion. This is a victory for democracy in action. Finland and Sweden are seeking to join NATO because their citizens demanded it, and their elected leaders heard them. That's how it works when leaders derive their power from the consent of the government—from consent of the governed.

And that's why NATO's open door has always been so important. It allows nations to choose for themselves to ask to be part of a group of nations that value freedom, democracy, and human dignity above all else. Countries must demonstrate that they meet NATO's high standards for military interoperability, economic transparency, and democratic accountability.

That's what Sweden and Finland have done. And so today it's an affirmation of those countries in Europe that share our values that we're willing and able to do what it takes to be part of the alliance. NATO's door remains open.

In just a few minutes, I'll be leaving to spend time with two of our Indo-Pacific allies. In a half-hour or so, I'll be flying to the Republic of Korea and Japan. I thank the President and the Prime Minister for traveling here on this meeting—for this meeting before I take off because it is so important.

America's alliances in Europe and in Asia keep us—and, I would argue, the world—strong and secure. They're how we confront the challenges of our time and deliver—deliver for our people today, and harness—harness opportunities for a better tomorrow. And I look forward soon calling Sweden and Finland our friends, partners, and NATO allies.

I want to thank you both for being here, and I'm going to invite each of you to say a few words. And we'll start—Mr. President, the podium is yours.

President Niinistö. Mr. President, thank you so very much.

President Biden. Thank you.

President Niinistö. Thank you.

Mr. President, it is with great pleasure and honor to be standing here today with you, together with the Swedish Prime Minister, Magdalena Andersson.

We are here for a very good reason. Together, we are taking a historic step by seeking to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Finland has made its decision after a rapid, but a very thorough process. The process has once again revealed the strength of Finnish democracy. Starting from the strong public support, the decision was made with an overwhelming parliamentary majority. And it also enjoys huge, strong popular support.

I want to thank you, Mr. President, for your steadfast support throughout this process. In early March, I visited White House, and you encouraged us to go further. That was of vital importance to our process. Your statement yesterday and our trilateral meeting today are a testimony of enduring commitment the United States has made to European and transatlantic security.

I want to assure that Finland will become a strong NATO ally. We take our security very seriously. The Finnish Armed Forces are one of the strongest in Europe. We have also consistently invested in developing our capabilities.

The Finns' willingness to defend their country is one of the highest in the whole world. We are ready to contribute to the security of the whole alliance, making the commitment to mutual security guarantees that being a NATO ally entails.

Now that we have taken this first decisive step, it is time for NATO allies to weigh in. We hope for strong support from all allies and for a swift ratification of our membership once it's agreed. I believe that the United States can set a crucially important example to others.

The Turkish leadership has recently expressed concerns about our membership application. I want to address these concerns today. Finland has always had proud and good bilateral relations to Turkey. As NATO allies, we will commit to Turkey's security, just as Turkey will commit to our security.

We take terrorism seriously. We condemn terrorism in all its forms, and we are actively engaged in combating it. We are open to discussing all the concerns Turkey may have concerning our membership in an open and constructive manner. These discussions have already taken place, and they will continue in the next days.

Twenty-fourth February, I said that the masks have fallen, and we see only the cold faces of war. Russia's war in Ukraine has changed Europe and our security environment. Finland takes the

step of NATO membership in order to strengthen not only its own security, but also in order to strengthen wider transatlantic security.

This is not away from anybody. Like you, Mr. President, said, NATO is protective, defensive, not a threat to anybody. At the same time, we must not forget that at this very moment, the brave people of Ukraine are fighting not only for their own freedom and democracy, but for our common security. Finland, together with the EU and the United States, stands firmly behind Ukraine.

So, Mr. President, once again, I want to thank you for making history with us. Thank you.

President Biden. Thank you. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Andersson. Mr. President, thank you for welcoming President Niinistö and me to the White House.

The bonds between Sweden and the United States, they are strong and longstanding. And as you know, Swedes first set foot in your home State of Delaware in 1638. *[Laughter]* And we were one of the first countries to recognize United States as an independent nation in 1783.

And since then, our countries have developed a deep and longstanding friendship through family ties, trade, and mutual interests. And I personally is very much one part of this. But most of all, our shared values and beliefs in democracy and freedom, values and beliefs that are now being put to the test.

And today, the situation in Ukraine reminds us of the darkest days of European history. And I must say that, during dark times, it is great to be among close friends. And over these past months, we have shown transatlantic unity and strength at its best. Together, we have responded forcefully to Russia's aggression and provided unprecedented support to Ukraine. We have not flinched.

And, Mr. President, I want to thank you for the massive U.S. support to Ukraine and for your sustained engagements in European society.

President Niinistö and I have come here at a historic moment for our countries. And for Sweden, after 200 years of military nonalignment, Sweden has chosen a new path. Yesterday Sweden and Finland submitted our formal requests to join NATO.

And Russia's full-scale aggression against a sovereign and democratic neighbor, that was a watershed moment for Sweden. And my government has come to the conclusion that the security of the Swedish people will be best protected within the NATO alliance. And this is backed by very broad support in the Swedish Parliament.

And with Sweden and Finland as members, NATO will also be stronger. We are security providers with sophisticated defense capabilities. And we are champions of freedom, democracy, and human rights.

We have a long tradition of extensive military cooperation with NATO, including all missions. And we are right now ramping up our defense spending, and we will reach 2 percent of GDP as soon as practically possible.

And, Mr. President, your support for our country's NATO aspirations for our security are of fundamental importance. And we look forward to a swift ratification process by NATO members. And we are right now having a dialogue with all NATO member countries, including Turkey, on different levels to sort out any issues at hand.

In the United States, the Senate is crucial in this regard. And last Saturday—Sunday, I hosted a delegation headed by Senate Republican Leader McConnell in Sweden. And later today,

President Niinistö and I will meet Senate Majority Leader Schumer and other leading Members of Congress. And we greatly appreciate the broad and strong support expressed by both parties in Congress.

But, Mr. President, our countries also work closer together when tackling global challenges. And Sweden, like other Nordic countries, has shown that emissions reductions can go hand in hand with economic growth. And in Sweden right now, the green transition creates thousands of jobs through investments in battery factories, green mining, and fossil-free steel production. And I actually brought the President a unique example of this: a candleholder made of the world's first fossil-free steel. *[Applause]*

President Biden. It's important.

Prime Minister Andersson. And what we see in Sweden right now is that previously neglected areas are no longer struggling with unemployment or depopulation, but how to build housing, infrastructure, and schools quick enough to meet up with the expansion.

And here, I see fantastic opportunities to cooperate between the Nordic countries and United States. And I'm also proud that Sweden contributes to the U.S. economy and the prosperity of the American people. Swedish companies are active in every single State, creating more than 350,000 jobs in the United States. And we are the 15th largest investor.

Mr. President, I want to thank you for your leadership in our joint efforts to promote democracy throughout the world. Because democracy requires constant work and safeguarding, we have to win every new generation.

And let me conclude where I started: Peace and stability in our part of the world is a common security interest for us, for you, and for the rest of Europe. And we stand here today more united than ever, and we are committed to strengthening our bonds even further. And Sweden is prepared to shoulder its responsibility as an ally in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Thank you.

President Biden. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

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